

How to capture Christmas Photos



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Capture the photos that portray the warmth, the spirit, and the festive cheer of Christmas

It's holiday time, which means big meals, a deluge of Christmas and holiday cards, family moments, decorations, gifts, and lots of photos.

Christmas photography is a lot of fun, here are a few simple techniques you can use to keep your photos looking crisp, bright, and beautiful!

The best part of Christmas photography is the countdown. This is just as important to photograph, as it maintains the memories and creates a festive atmosphere for years to come.

Make sure that you've got your camera ready when wrapping presents, putting up decorations, decorating cookies, enjoying hot chocolate by the fire, setting the table, decorating the tree and placing the star on the top.

Get ready in advance

Prepare Your Camera for Christmas

Carefully set your white balance

Set your aperture

Diffuse or bounce your flash

Set your shutter speed relatively low

Use a shallow depth of field for a dreamy holiday look

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Forget flash

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Set your aperture for f/8

Go for an incandescent white balance

Need more light, increase the exposure time (slow shutter speed)

Fill the frame

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Family Portraits

Gather the Family for Christmas Group Portraits

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Light Your Christmas Photos with Christmas Lights

By following the tips below you should be able to capture some fantastic images

.The best Christmas photo settings

- grab your camera,
- do a bit of preparation,
- Enjoy your Christmas gatherings!

Get ready in advance

Preparing to capture the Christmas festivities is key to a successful shoot. You should get yourself ready by making sure that:

- You pack the camera
- Your batteries are charged
- you have either backups or a recharger
- have extra memory cards
- What will the lighting be like where you plan to celebrate Christmas?
- Will it be bright? Dim?
- Will you be outdoors? Inside?
- Will there be lots of window light?
- Will you need a flash
- Check the weather; clouds and sun can make a big difference.

Prepare Your Camera for Christmas

Double check everything is prepared before the big day. Don't forget to check your battery is fully charged, your memory card has been formatted

Maybe try out a few test shots the day before so you know what the lighting will be like indoors. Ensuring your camera settings are prepped and knowing where the best angle of view is in your house will save you a lot of time later on.

Take note of the colour balance of your shots and adjust it in-camera to give you camera confidence that you won't have to spend ages readjusting in post-production.

Carefully set your white balance

If you'll be working with artificial light, pay attention to the type of light you encounter and set your white balance accordingly. If you're really serious, you can even set a custom white balance using a gray card!

Set your aperture

When taking shots of a Christmas decorations on the tree, select a large aperture (f/2.8) to throw the background out of focus and create a beautiful blur effect.

When photographing people sitting at the table, choose a small aperture (f/11) to keep everyone in focus.

Don't set your lens aperture and forget about it; adjusting the aperture to suit the subject.

Diffuse the or bounce the flash

If you live in a colder area, Christmas gatherings will be taking place indoors, and you'll be tempted to use a flash to brighten up the dark interiors. However, if you do use a flash, you risk creating shots that are so bright that the subjects look like rabbits in a spotlight (with harsh shadows in the background).

Fortunately, you can get around this by using a flash diffuser or reflector. Another option – if you have an external flash – is to bounce it off the walls or the ceiling.

If you're struggling to get good shots while using your flash, you can always put it away, adjust your lens's aperture to its widest setting, and raise your camera's ISO until you get a good exposure. You do risk adding unwanted noise to your images, but modern-day cameras produce minimal noise even at ISO 1600 and beyond.

Set your shutter speed relatively low

You'll need a tripod to compose your shots because the shutter's open longer. these are still life shots.

Use a shallow depth of field for a dreamy holiday look

Shooting with a shallow depth of field is a staple of that warm, dreamy holiday photography we all know and love. Shallow depth of field means that there's a really narrow range between what's in focus and what's blurry.

To get this look, you need to be pretty close to your subject, with a long focal length and the right aperture settings.

Look for Interesting Perspectives

Whether close-up or wide, top-down or looking up, try to find a unique perspective to capture interesting Christmas photos. It's one thing to walk up and photograph a scene as is, and another to look for unique angles. Cropping the frame a certain way can also add mystery and interest to an otherwise ordinary scene. For instance, the tight shot of the image above is likely more interesting than a wider shot that would've shown other people standing around and photographing the neatly decorated and lit tree with their smartphones.

Capture the Christmas preparations

The actual Christmas meal or party is the best part of the day, but there are other photos worth taking, especially during those essential preparation stages.

- Food being made
- Decorations being hung
- Gifts being wrapped
- Children throwing tantrums as they're dressed in Christmas outfits
- Tables being set

The shots before the main event actually starts are often great because they show everything at its best before everyone descends on the party zone.

Take the before and after shots

Arrive early to the location of the festivities, set up in advance, and capture the shots just before people walk in the door.

After the party is over, take shots once again. For the best results, make sure you take the shots from the same position. That way, you can compare them side by side and see the exact effects of the party!

Take the group photos at the beginning

Group photos are a Christmas photography classic! However, these shots are usually taken at the end of the day or late in the evening when everyone is at their worst.

Instead, for a fresher shot, take the group photos as soon as everyone arrives. Also, think beforehand about how you might pose everyone and where you might take the shot.

Try a time-lapse Christmas series

Set up a webcam in the corner of the room. The camera should be aimed on the Christmas table, and set to go off every five minutes over the course of the day.

You don't need to use a webcam; any camera will do, including a smartphone. Just set it up in advance to shoot images at regular intervals, then come back at the end of the event and grab it.

Try macro

Many lenses can focus fairly close, so why not try zooming on in and photographing the smaller items around your party?

Ornaments on the tree, table decorations, sweets in the bowl on the table, a nativity scene on the mantelpiece, holly above the doorway; sometimes it's these small things that are the real money shots!

Look for Detail Shots

The little details of Christmas Day make it special be sure to capture every precious moment; from the first realisation that Santa has dropped in, to playing with new toys in Christmas pyjamas.

Detail shots are just as important as the portraits. Little close-up shots such as the wrapping paper, the decorations, presents, the festive food and the empty plates which add flavour and stories to your Christmas photography memories!

Use your camera's close-up/macro settings to get your shots as close in as possible.

After you've completed all your Christmas photography, sit back and relax... and enjoy your day!

After all the rush and excitement of the day, don't forget to take time out and steal a few moments for yourself to reflect upon the big day.

Include a focal point in your photos

The problem with Christmas events is that there is so much color, lighting, and people that all the different subjects compete for attention. If you include too many elements, the viewer will be confused and the image just won't work.

On the other hand, if you identify a single focal point and exclude any potential distractions, the final image will look far better! In my view, all good shots have a focal point that holds the attention of the viewer. So work hard to declutter your images. Figure out the item you want to emphasize, and then compose the entire shot with it in mind.

Pick out Textural Images

Lighting your scene correctly will make a huge difference. This is especially true if you are trying to emulate the magical atmosphere.

Indoor lighting can be tricky with the warm Christmas lights. Make sure that your white balance is set correctly for your Christmas lighting.

Household lighting tends to cast warm tones. You will need to counter it using an incandescent white balance setting to counteract the warm colour temperature.

Photograph the Christmas lights

Good Christmas light shots look incredible – but photographing Christmas lights isn't the easiest.

Use a wide aperture for a shallow depth-of-field effect

Make sure that the lights are well exposed (even if it means letting the background fall into darkness)

Experiment with different points of focus (try using your lens's manual focus setting if you're struggling)

Shoot in Burst mode as needed

There are certain moments during a Christmas gathering that are filled with photographic opportunities. When people are opening gifts, for instance, you're generally faced with an array of emotions and facial expressions (especially if kids are involved).

So instead of trying to time your shots just right, switch your camera to Burst mode (also known as continuous shooting mode) and take lots of images when the excitement begins. That way, you can capture everything: The anticipation of getting the wrapped gift, the fun of unwrapping, and the joy (or occasionally disappointment) of seeing what's inside.

(Don't forget to shoot the reactions of those who give the gift, as well.)

Fill the frame

It's one of the most common Christmas photography mistakes: People photograph from across the room, so they end up portraying their subjects off in the distance with lots of space around them. The resulting images lack impact – but they could easily be so much better if the photographer just filled the frame!

So use your zoom or physically move yourself closer, then fill the frame with your subject. This is one of the simplest tips I can give, but it's one that can have a seriously profound impact on your shots.

Explore your neighborhood

You have an unlimited number of photographic opportunities all around you! Christmas carolers, houses covered in Christmas decorations, shopping malls filled with festive cheer; it all makes for great photos. Get out with your camera and capture the fun. Christmas really is a wonderful time of year to spend time behind the camera!

Shooting outdoor Christmas light backgrounds

Most Christmas light photos look basically the same. There are buildings and trees with lights against a pitch black background. Lights look the best in the dark.

When it's pitch black outside, exposure becomes tricky. Your camera can either properly expose for the lights or for the lights' surroundings. If the camera exposes for the lights, they'll look like they're floating in nothingness. If it exposes for the surroundings, the lights will be completely washed out, almost colorless.

Photograph around twilight or dusk

For a few minutes, the atmospheric light will perfectly complement the continuous artificial lights. You'll pick up the beautiful ambient colors of the sky and surroundings and get much more photographic texture than the flat blackness. Expose for the lights, not the sky. That way, the sky's ambient light will come in to complement the lights, which can hold your focus.

Act fast

If you've tried to photograph a sunset, you know how quickly the light changes. Between sunset and nightfall, each minute will bring slightly different lighting conditions. This means that you have plenty of opportunity to capture a variety of scenes, but not a lot of actual time.

Use a tripod

Without it, you'll probably end up sacrificing a lot of image quality Due to camera shake. So unless you've got superhuman steadiness, Use a tripod.

Forget flash

You're trying to capture the color of the lights, and even if they aren't multi-colored, your flash could interfere with the lights' color profile. And that's if your flash even shows up. Unless you have an incredibly powerful flash or are very close to your subject, the flash isn't likely to contribute much to the exposure anyway. **Keep the flash off.**

Start with an ISO around 400

If your photos are too dark, increase it, but know that any increase to the ISO will degrade image quality. With a tripod, use the lowest ISO possible. Low ISO means higher quality, high ISO, produces a grainy image

Set your aperture for f/8

This is a good starting point: lower numbers let in more light, and higher numbers let in less.

Go for an incandescent white balance

Your camera might call it Tungsten, The lights that you're photographing are likely incandescent bulbs, the Incandescent setting will faithfully render the color of your lights.

need more light, increase the exposure time (slow shutter speed)

Do this instead of increasing the ISO — this prevents the grain that will be introduced by the higher ISO, plus long exposure captures the full glory of the light display.

Fill the frame

Fill it with everything you're trying to capture, including some negative space or reflective surfaces. Snow, water, or even wet concrete will add that special effect called reflection by softly reflecting your lights.

Increase shutter speed for blinking lights

This helps capture the full light cycle

Adjust your white balance for warmer lights

Want your lights to look warmer? Incandescent lights shot with your white balance set to Daylight will make the lights look more orange. If your holiday lights are LED or full spectrum and you set your white balance to Incandescent, then the lights in the photo will look more blue than your eye perceived them. LEDs can be weird and inconsistent, try the AWB (Auto White Balance) setting.

Shooting indoor Christmas lights

Photographing Christmas trees, menorahs, or any kind of interior light arrangement can be trickier than shooting outside. Your camera can get stuck between adjusting to the dark background and the actual bulbs, so automatic settings don't really work

Brighten up the scene

Bring extra lamps or any other light source into the room to brighten the shadows and decrease the contrast that might confuse your camera.

A wide open aperture is a must

The low end of your aperture window like f/11 just won't work because there's an inverse relationship between the aperture setting and how much light it lets in. You need to let in a lot of light with a setting f/2.

A wide aperture will throw your background out of focus, and your holiday lights should become little luminous balls. You can make the balls bigger by increasing the distance between your subject and the lights. Plus, you can make your balls look like hexagons (or octagons, by closing the aperture a bit).

Family Portraits

Who doesn't love the traditional family photograph? Whether it's for next year's Christmas card or simply to remember the day, it is essential to get it right the first time

Sit everyone down in front of the tree and surround them with presents or decorative objects to set the scene.

Use a tripod and self-timer so that you don't miss out too! Try not to leave any empty space in between people, as this can give the impression of omission.

Throughout the day, try to take some candid group shots too, family members laughing, pulling crackers or carving the meat.

These often turn out to be the favourites, as they show the emotions of the day.

Gather the Family for Christmas Group Portraits

Selfies are great for group portraits but be sure to grab a group photo as well. Christmas, like weddings or World Cup matches, represents one of those rare occasions when people make a point to attend. Look for a clean backdrop in a well-lit spot and pose the group for a memorable holiday portrait. Place your camera on a tripod and dial in the focus before setting a timer and jumping in the shot. Of course, if you can trigger your camera remotely, that would be ideal.

Pose for Holiday Portraits

You don't have to have a Santa Claus outfit to create Christmas portraits, but it doesn't hurt! Most households that celebrate Christmas typically decorate their living space with a tree, wreath, presents, or other items. Even if you don't have Christmas decorations, you can hang some string lights in the background to create a festive vibe. It's a great opportunity to test your lighting skills, whether using natural lighting or off-camera flash.

Photograph the Children

The Christmas portraits that really shine have the focus point set on the subject's eyes. The eyes show genuine emotions that will make your portraits glisten with heart-warming memories.

This is where we look when talking to a person, and the same goes in photography. We automatically look straight to the eyes, therefore it is vital to make sure that they're in focus.

For Christmas group portraits though, you're going to be safest using a smaller aperture. Start off shooting at F/11, particularly if there are children in the shot who might not stay still for long enough.

If you do have children in your shot, make sure your shutter speed goes no slower than 1/125th to avoid motion blur.

To set the Christmas spirit in your shots, get up close with your subjects in order to fill the frame. One of the wonderful parts of Christmas photography is spending time with your family, who are more than likely already comfortable being photographed by you,

To ensure that your images clearly set the time of year and the celebration, try to include some of that dashing décor in the background of your images, like the Christmas tree.

Photograph Santa's Little Helpers, aka Your Pets

It's been said that a dog is a man's best friend, but really, pets are family. Don't forget to include them in some of your Christmas portraits. It might be best to time these shots when you're not hosting guests. That way, your pets can pose more freely without the excitement of visitors making still portraits an impossibility. Special Christmas treats may be in order to encourage better participation, but you know your pet best. If you don't have props or outfits, like the Santa hat used above, just choose a location in your home that features holiday decorations.

Capture Candid Family Activities

The holidays are often associated with holiday activities, and as the actual day draws nearer, holiday parties. Jump into photojournalist mode and capture these activities and get-togethers to document the full story of the season. Whether you and the family are decorating the tree, baking cookies, or building a snowman for those in the snow, break out the camera and immortalize the moments.

Shoot in Aperture Priority Mode

Taking your Christmas photographs in Aperture priority (A/Av) mode allows you to take control over your depth of field.

This removes the headache of worrying about shutter speed or ISO. Shooting in aperture priority gives you easy adjustment options throughout the day. As well as for quick transitions between candid portraits and close ups of delicious food.

You'll be able to move between large and small apertures is simply at your fingertips.

think of a shot of the family sitting around the table. use a mid to small aperture (F/8) to ensure everyone is featured clearly, whereas an ornament on the tree would require a large aperture (F/2.8)

Highlight the Decorations for Christmas Photography

With holidays come decorations. We mentioned this above when looking to use the decorations as part of a backdrop for Christmas portraits. This time around, however, the decorations themselves will take center stage for holiday still-life photos. Look for interesting layouts that are already set up or, if you have permission, get proactive and rearrange the objects into a pleasant composition that tells a story about or clearly identifies the holiday. Use different angles (wide, medium, and tight) and switch up the perspective to keep it interesting.

Light Your Christmas Photos with Christmas Lights

If the ambient light is dark enough, you can use Christmas lights as the key light in your photos. These decorative lights work equally well for lighting subjects or being the subject. They can also create an amazing backdrop when you place them in front of or behind your subject with enough distance and the best settings to achieve this effect.

Conclusion

Hopefully these Christmas photography ideas have been helpful and are inspired to capture the holidays in a fun and creative way. Even if you don't celebrate Christmas, you can find new and exciting ways to let the winter season inspire your photography.

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Bio

My name is David Wright.

I have many years experience writing procedures on how to test high tech electronic equipment. Re wrote technical manuals so that the average person could understand them.

Set up numerous training programs to train Junior techs.

My documenting skills are excellent paying attention to details satisfying the toughest ISO auditors.

I have enhanced my writing skills by successfully completing a course in Writing for Children's literature.

Completed course from AWAI in Copy writing service ,B2B copy writing, Seo management , Email marketing and web design

This has helped me write how to articles and Information Books that you will find on my website Discount E Books <http://www.discount-ebook-s.com/>

I have had a Camera in my Hand since 1965 Gone pro In 1999

Took the course from ICS in Photography

I am now at a point in life I would like to share my knowledge with the world and the best way I know how is by Print either electronically or Hard copy paper.

David Wright

Electronic service technician

Professional Photographer

Experience writer